

HR Corner

Mutual trust central to organisational culture

by Charles Mak



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Photo: Nolly Leung

Direct communication between staff and management vital in times of change

On 1 January this year the Construction Industry Training Authority (CITA) amalgamated with the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and became the Construction Industry Council Training Academy (CICTA), operating under the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). It is hoped this change of management infrastructure will consolidate the organisation's long-established strengths and build on its existing values to create further success.

Charles Wong, director, training, Construction Industry Council Training Academy explains that the organisation's acronym has always stood for its core values: care, identity, trust and achievement. As CITA has now effectively become CICTA, the extra letter "C" has been incorporated into those values as "commitment".

"It's not just for the sake of the additional letter," Mr Wong stresses. "Over the past 30 years, all our staff have demonstrated a 'can-do' attitude. We have been and will continue to be committed to nurturing the best employable workforce for the local construction industry and we take pride in that."

To accentuate the organisation's values, Mr Wong believes that staff must be encouraged to "live the values". As such, a range of discussion and consultation sessions involving all 380-plus staff was recently held, aiming at obtaining staff feedback and suggestions and ultimately at reaching a consensus.

"To optimise results, we must first and foremost identify the most appropriate channels. The implementation process is a communication tool per se because it is not our aim to promote but instead inculcate our values and let staff take the initiative," Mr Wong remarks.

Build rapport

Over the 30 years of operation, CICTA has put in place various communication channels. For instance, there are scheduled staff consultation meetings hosted by HR managers and selected managerial staff, who visit all departments and collect feedback and suggestions. There are also quarterly staff meetings chaired by Mr Wong, during which more than 20 department representatives discuss key issues concerning the organisation's policies, practice and development. Minutes of meetings and action taken are posted on the intranet. In addition, the academy has an established mechanism to handle staff enquiries and even complaints.

"Whatever the training, meeting expectations is key"

Mr Wong says individual channels serve specific purposes and that setting the right tone for discussion helps boost communication effectiveness. "Depending on the gravity of the message, a formal setting ensures constructive feedback. Conversely, a relaxed atmosphere encourages open conversations."

Direct and honest communication remains key in any circumstances, he notes. "Whatever the purpose and objective, there has to be trust between the messenger and the audience. Colleagues who set aside time to sit and talk with me help send messages across to their peers. This is why an open-door policy is necessary and we must walk the talk to give sometimes potentially vague management concepts definite meanings."

For instance, he adds, since last March he has scheduled a fortnightly visit to each of the organisation's centres seeking staff views on the amalgamation. "They were particularly concerned about potential changes in the work environment, organisational structure and conditions of service. My role was to listen and answer their queries and inform them of the amalgamation process," he says.

Staff focus

Change is constant and the organisation has learnt how best to deal with it. "There has to be a buffer period when changes are put in place in an established environment," Mr Wong says. "At the end of the day, it's really down to the approach we adopt. In other words, we must ensure changes do not compromise our values or jeopardise the existing culture."

Mr Wong stresses that management must gain the trust of staff and show sincerity when communicating with them. "To establish trust, you must be truthful," he emphasises. "You must respect that staff have the right to be informed. Management transparency means a great deal in today's staff-management relationships."

In times of uncertainty, maintaining a high level of staff loyalty is also important. "Loyalty is a by-product of a great culture," Mr Wong says. "We must continue to foster loyalty by building staff competence, providing our people with both vertical and horizontal career development and continuous learning opportunities."

To put this theory into practice the organisation has designed a three-tier training and development survey for management, supervisors and frontline staff to identify their core development needs.

"Empowerment takes many forms. One is to allow staff opportunities to grow by taking on increased responsibilities," Mr Wong says. "Such empowerment entails accountability which in turn fosters a mindset of not being afraid of making mistakes. That's what our organisation hopes to achieve."

Salient points

- Caring culture motivates staff and encourages advancement
- Identity consolidated to reflect quality
- Commitment to training excellence boosts professional image
- Trust between peers, departments and local industries a focal point
- Achievement-oriented mentality drives performance

Taken from *Career Times* 1 February 2008, p. A20
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